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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 001328

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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, AND USAID (MAGAN)  
WHITE HOUSE FOR SONYA MEDINA  
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SUBJECT: PARAGUAY HOSTS LATIN AMERICAN FIRST LADIES  
CONFERENCE

REF: ASUNCION 1063

11. (U) SUMMARY: From September 28-30, Paraguay hosted the 13th Conference of First Ladies, Spouses, and Representatives of Heads of State and Government of the Americas. The substantive theme of the 13th Conference was "Women and Family." First Ladies from 11 countries attended, including Colombia, Panama, Guatemala, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Chile. Nine countries sent representatives in lieu of their country's First Lady. Ambassador to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Ellen Sauerbrey, represented Laura Bush at the conference. Local press highlighted the absence of Paraguay's MERCOSUR partners, as Brazil and Argentina sent only a representative and Uruguay did not participate in the conference. Despite some debate during the second round of technical meetings that were held in advance of the First Ladies Conference, all attending delegates signed the Draft Declaration and approved the Action Plan. END SUMMARY.

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Preparatory Meetings Spark Debate  
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12. (U) Country delegations attended the second Technical Preparatory Meeting September 26 - 27 in order to reach consensus on a Declaration and a Action Plan prior to the arrival of the First Ladies. (The first Technical Preparatory Meeting took place in Asuncion in July 2005.) The 2005 Asuncion Declaration was signed by each of the First Ladies and Representatives. In the Declaration, they agreed to consider the issues of gender equality, education, health, remunerated work, gender-based violence, and trafficking in persons. The Action Plan, which is an unsigned document, confirms the commitment of the First Ladies to promote and strengthen the purposes and principles contained in the Declaration. The Action Plan proposes guidelines that the First Ladies and Representatives "may consider, depending on the role they play in their respective countries, according to national laws and practices."

13. (SBU) Although consensus was achieved on both Conference documents, there was lengthy debate between the delegations on the appropriate role of a First Ladies Conference. USDEL argued against attempts by other delegations, notably Ecuador and Argentina, to politicize the role of the First Lady and the Conference. USDEL's explanation that the U.S. First Lady does not have policy responsibility and the U.S. would not welcome a more politicized Conference was supported by the Costa Rican, Panamanian, and Canadian delegations. Efforts by the Paraguayan and Dominican Republic delegations to muster support for the adoption of a set of "General Rules" to codify procedures for future First Ladies Conferences also demonstrated significant disagreement among the delegates over the appropriate function of a First Ladies Conference. The delegations eventually agreed to postpone discussion of the "General Rules" until the first preparatory meeting for the next First Ladies Conference to be held in San Salvador in 2007. The delegates also agreed to begin referring to the "General Rules" as a guide rather than a legally binding document. El Salvador promised to work on solidifying the "General Rules" prior to the 2007 meeting.

14. (SBU) There was significant debate concerning mention of the role of the father in the Declaration. Delegates finally agreed to recognize the "positive role of the father and his co-responsibility in the development of the family and society." Other terms and phrases such as; "gender equity and equality", "remunerated domestic work," "values," and "sexual and reproductive rights" also sparked debate among the delegations. Some discussion focused on which international conferences should be referenced in the Declaration. The delegations decided to consider a comprehensive list of international conferences in the document with a caveat sentence, "respecting the reservations of some countries." The inclusion of a paragraph on the impact of drug abuse on the family also generated some debate. The rest of the discussion on the Declaration concerned language on sexual and reproductive health, which was ultimately contextualized "in the fight against HIV/AIDS,

and other STIs."

15. (SBU) Due to time constraints and the fact that delegates had not previously had an opportunity to address it, the Action Plan generated more disagreement among delegates than the Declaration. Confusion over the process for reaching consensus and the purpose of the document added intensity to the debate. With the assistance of Canada, USDEL was able to include an introductory paragraph to the Action Plan which clarified (for the first time) the purpose and intent of the document. The delegations finally agreed on a general outline of themes and guidelines, and discarded the detailed prescriptions for action contained in the original draft Plan.

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The First Ladies and Representatives Sign Off  
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16. (U) Each First Lady or representative provided a brief summary centered on the conference's theme, "Women and Family", which included highlights of programs and activities offered in their countries to aid the advancement of health care, education, reduction of poverty for women and children. In her remarks, Ambassador Sauerbrey highlighted the importance of the family, improved access to health care, the importance of literacy for women, and U.S. AID programs throughout the region. Ambassador Sauerbrey included a statement in her speech that language in the Conference documents referencing sexual and reproductive health was not understood by the United States to promote abortion. All countries present signed the Conference Declaration and approved of Action Plan.

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Comment  
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17. (SBU) There seems to be a movement on the part of several countries in the region to politicize the function of the First Ladies Conference as evidenced by a push from several delegations to include inappropriate policy language in the outcome documents. There were also efforts to add political weight to the Conference itself. In this context, attention should be given to preparations for the 2007 Conference to see that procedures are not further codified by the adoption of a set of "General Rules." It is also worth noting that several multilateral organizations took a more prominent role in this Conference than in previous years.

18. (U) Ambassador Sauerbrey and the U.S. Delegation have cleared on this cable.

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